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AUTHOR	Naylor, Michele
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ABSTRACT

Research indicates that the family has a great influence on a child's employment and educational decisions. Family-oriented career development programs are needed for several reasons. Parents indirectly increase their children's career options and career development by enhancing their own employability and career planning skills. Research documents the influence of parental role models; because children are generally in closer contact with parents or other family members than with anyone else, family members are in a good position to serve as resource persons for their children. A wide variety of family-oriented career development programs, each focusing on audience-specific needs, is required. Audience-specific programs could be designed to address the needs posed by the employment outlook in a given geographical area, a special need (such as limited English ability), or a given disability. Practitioners can respond to the need for family-oriented career education by developing a comprehensive plan for counselor interventions that revolves around helping young adults recognize the influence of family and increase their personal autonomy through a three-step exploration of self, educational/occupational information, and relationships with family and significant others. The parental role in the career development process should be a dual one that involves serving as a guide or resource person for one's own children and an advocate of increased career educational opportunities for all children. (MN)

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OVERVIEW

ERIC DIGEST NO.56

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

FAMILY INFLUENCES ON EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

The influence of family on occupational and educational attainment has been a subject of great interest to vocational and career educators and researchers alike. As is evident from a literature review done by Otto and Call (1985), researchers in such diverse fields as child development, sociology, demography, and career development have long recognized that families play a major role in shaping their children's educational and career decisions. Only when career educators understand the nature and extent of the family's influence on employment and education can they develop effective strategies for helping parents help their children make appropriate and satisfying career and educational choices. This *Overview* summarizes information about the family's influence on employment and education and describes intervention strategies for practitioners and parents to use in assisting youth in reaching their full educational and employment potential.

How Does the Family Influence Occupational/Educational Attainment and Choice?

Splete and Freeman-George (1985) list the following significant family influence factors that affect a child's career and educational decisions: (1) geographic location, (2) genetic inheritance, (3) family background, (4) socioeconomic status, (5) family composition, (6) parenting style, and (7) parent work-related attitudes. Whereas the first four of these factors have a strong influence on a child's physical and mental abilities, education and employment opportunities, and financial resources, the last three have a profound effect on a child's personality type, preference for certain types of interpersonal relationships, work attitudes, and willingness to pursue a nontraditional career.

It is also important to remember that the career development process begins long before the adult years. McDaniel and Hummel (1984) discuss the career development process in terms of three phases: awareness (before age 11), exploration (ages 11 to 17), and preparation (age 17 to young adulthood). In her study of the family-career connection, Miller (1984) discusses career development in terms of a process beginning in the preschool year and reviews the effects of parents as role models in the career decisions of sons and daughters.

Why Are Family-Oriented Career Development Programs Needed?

The aforementioned discussion of the documented influence of parents on their children's career and educational choices and the importance of parental role models are obvious answers to this question. In a 1980 speech, Becky L. Schergens, then executive director of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, discussed yet another reason for family-oriented career development programs. Recognizing that parents play a central role in their children's career development and that parents indirectly help their children by helping themselves, Schergens asserts that "parents must work with their children not only in the discussion of a selection of a career but also in terms of sharpening their own employability skills" (p. 4). She places particular emphasis on the need for parents to teach and reinforce the need for adaptability and flexibility in this world of rapid change.

What Specific Kinds of Programs Are Needed?

Schergens suggests that a parent's effectiveness as a resource person on which a child can draw in the career development process is directly dependent upon the parent's own career development and knowledge of the world of work. Therefore, a variety of different programs, each focusing on audience-specific needs, are required. Otto (1983) discusses the occupational outlook for the different regions of the United States and the various offerings available at postsecondary institutions. Gormley (1983) describes an audiovisual/print prevocational education program designed to meet the special needs of bilingual junior high students and their parents. The program features home learning activities focusing on developing prevocational skills, making free time pay off, making the most of oneself, and developing appropriate work attitudes and behavior. Another program intended to train parents to train their special needs children in making the transition from school to career is that outlined in the package entitled *Corridors to Careers: A Guide for Parents and Disabled Youth* (Izzo, Kopp, and Liming 1986). This training program for parents of disabled youth features—

- parent guides covering career exploration and planning for transition through the Individualized Education Program (IEP) (assessing interests and abilities, learning what appropriate jobs are available, understanding training options, and identifying modifications needed at the work site);
- job search and survival skills (obtaining job leads, writing application letters and resumes, interviewing, and developing good work habits);
- independent living skills (identifying transportation and housing needs and options, developing home management and decision-making skills, and building interpersonal skills).

The package also includes a trainer's manual explaining ways in which parent training teams can teach other parents to play a supportive role in the school-to-work transition of their own disabled adolescents.

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How Can Practitioners Meet the Need for Family-Oriented Career Development?

One way of responding to the need for family-oriented career education is to follow Schergens' (1980) suggestion and help parents become better "career counselors" by helping them develop their own employability skills. Another important role

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of parent education is to address the unique needs of parents of different groups of special needs children. Splete and Freeman-George (1985) outline a comprehensive plan for counselor interventions that revolves around helping young adults recognize the influences of family and increase their personal autonomy through a three-step exploration of self, educational/occupational information, and relationships with family and significant others. Representative interventions in the model include making a family systems review, developing paradigms of family interaction, and making an occupational family tree.

What Steps Can Parents Take on Their Own?

Schergens (1980) sees a dual role for parents in the career development process: as guides or resource persons for their own children and as advocates for increased opportunities in the area of career education for all children, with emphasis on the impact that parents can have at the community, state, and local levels. Stressing the importance of the parent as a provider of information and experiences conducive to the formation of proper school and work attitudes, McDaniels and Hummel (1984) list 13 steps that parents can take to assist in their children's career development. These include encouraging the development of such basic work attitudes as promptness, respect, and responsibility; stressing that the work children do in school is good, important, and related to the larger world of work; helping children understand that no one individual can be completely competent in all things; providing a climate conducive to study; serving as the connecting link between home and school; and encouraging participation in diverse experiences outside of school, including leisure activities and part-time jobs.

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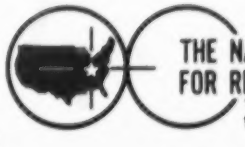

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